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Thus though the demands of near relatives are imperative, part of the art of good housekeeping consists in knowing where to draw the line without giving offence, and in successfully appraising the respective claims of different kinsmen, and it is this art which Bemba girls only acquire slowly by dint of joint co-operation in their mother's team.

Methods of Measurement.

Besides the means by which she satisfies her kinship obligations it is important to consider the actual methods by which quantities are measured in this community and hence how the needs of the year are estimated. The householder's powers of calculating her assets depend on the system of numeration used in this particular culture, the material apparatus for measuring, and last but not least, the incentives the people have to estimate the quantities of their supplies. In short, can the Bemba count, and do they consider it necessary to do so? The difference is of considerable importance practically. European systems of commensuration are so exact that a woman could reckon the daily intake of each member of her family with the accuracy of a laboratory feeding experiment, if she wanted to do so. But we know that in fact the planning of weekly food-supplies varies according to class and locality in every possible way, from the family with a large regular income that can buy large quantities of stores at a time and reckons to use similar amounts of different commodities each week, to those living under more precarious conditions that customarily drink beer on a Saturday evening, eat a large meat meal on Sunday, and exist for the rest of the week as best they can, running out for extra groceries as long as the money lasts. Among the Bemba the power of calculating quantities is far less exact, and the incentive to estimate nutritional needs precisely is even less than in our own community.

The Bemba system of numerals is very similar to that employed by the other Bantu peoples—that is to say numbers up to ten are expressed by words and the use of the fingers arranged in a series of different positions, increase in quantity being emphasized by a rising tone of the voice. The four fingers are used in counting with the thumb folded in to the centre of the hand. Thus the index finger raised alone on the right hand means one, the index and second fingers joined means two, the third finger raised with

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802 a gap between it and the first two fingers stands for three, and the two pairs of fingers with a gap in between for four, while the closed fist represents five. The other numbers are indicated on the right hand, while figures above ten are represented by giving the ten sign with two closed fists and then starting to indicate the units again.

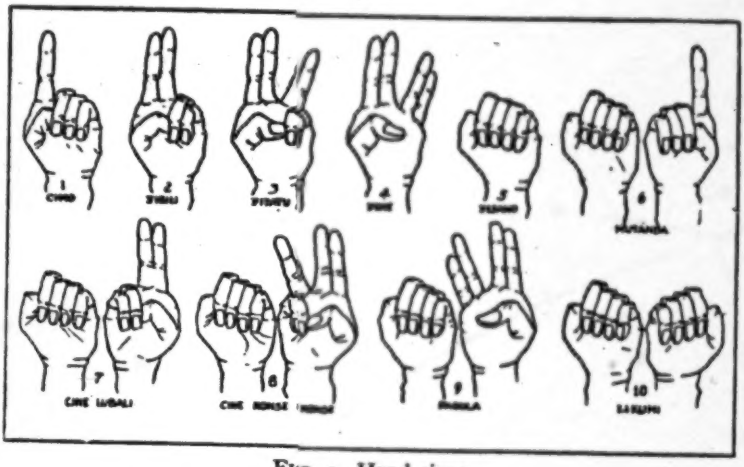

FIG. 4. Hand-signs.

The method of representing high numbers is thus exceedingly clumsy and any Bemba who have come in contact with Europeans have quickly adopted our system of counting.

In point of fact high numbers are not needed in ordinary Bemba life since the objects to be counted rarely exceed 20 in number, in distinction from the cattle-owning Bantu who reckon herds by the hundred and thousand. In fact the Bemba seem quite uninterested in big numbers as such. Their folk-tales, unlike those of a [538] number of primitive peoples, do not dwell on the hundreds of cattle, horses, wives, spears, &c., that the hero possesses, but merely on the difference between 'many' and 'big' and 'very many' or 'very big' expressed with great emphasis of the voice and a rising tone.

804 There are no definite units of length, weight, or capacity in this community. Though the Bemba are perfectly capable of measuring length accurately in such operations as house-building or furniture-making in which it is necessary to do so, they work by comparing the sizes of different objects such as two poles with a